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The Right to Freedom

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96"



6th of December, Minsk

ANNIVERSARY BEHIND BARS

On December 10, the whole world celebrated the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but the chairman of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» Ales Bialatsky marked it in... in prison. He was detained and sentenced to 10 days for staging and holding a meeting on December 6, dedicated to this very anniversary. He was not the only one to be arrested: deputy chief of the Belarusan Popular Front Yury Khadyka, journalist-communist Valery Shchukin and some four citizens of the Republic of Belarus were detained as well. Some people were fined for participation in the action.

It isn't just symbolic, that the head of the Human Rights Centre marked the anniversary of the Declaration in prison, it only confirms that the current situation in Belarus is by far more complicated and vividly proves the authorities' attitude to human rights in the country.

By the way, long before the anniversary President Lukashenka and his supporters had declared that the country should mark the 50[th] anniversary of Human Rights in the way it would meet «high-level requirements». They had worked out the programme of activities, dedicated to this occasion. But not a single one had been performed.

The day of December 10 was marked quietly and imperceptibly there was no planned festive sitting, no national celebration. This anniversary was marked only by new arrests of human rights defenders.

But in general, if we speak about the results of this anniversary year President of Belarus «could have boasted» while making a speech at the festive sitting. More than 500 people have been arrested fined or imprisoned for opposition, activities this year. Malady Front member Alyaxey Shydlousky who was charged with graffiti is still in prison. 7 people were put on probation. Parliamentarians of the Supreme Soviet Uladzimir Kudzinau, and Andrey Klimau as well as the leader of Vitsebsk branch of the BPF Uladzimir Pleshchanka are still in prison «under investigation». More than 100 Belarusan citizens, who were persecuted by the authorities and whose lives were under threat, asked for political asylum abroad.

«The achievements» are obvious. Especially when the country suffers from deep economic crisis, covering all the industries and agriculture, all the population. Being afraid of mass working meeting headed by Independent Trade Unions, the President in person visited all the greatest enterprises in December, and his subordinated Mass Media launched a discrediting and abusive campaign against the Trade Union movement.

(to be continued on p.7)

CHRONICLE

On December 1, **at the Gomel Plant «Electraaparatura» (Electronic equipment) there was a spontaneous meeting of workers from the instrumental section Anatol Paplauny, chairman of a local Trade Union assumed responsibility for this action. The workers demanded to raise their wages.**

On December 1, **on the International Day of Struggle against AIDS, the Gomel organisation of «Gramadziansky Forum» decided to contribute to the cause of struggle against the XX-th century disease. Nicely-decorated, box with condoms was delivered to Gomel District Committee of BPYU (Belarusan Patriotic Youth Union) together with their wish: «For your future reproduction». By this action «Gramadziansky Forum» intended to save the public not only from AIDS but also from the dangerous disease – lukashism, because BPYU is the epicentre of it.**

On December 2, **the Trade Unions planned to stage a meeting of protest but they postponed it on the January 27, 1999. At the press-conference the organisers of the action (the leaders of Belarus' five largest sectoral trade unions) announced the reason for that: 20 degree below zero and the governmental agreement to negotiate with the Trade Unions.**

On December 2, **Vadzim Kanapatsky, an observer of «Vyasna-96» and Vyachaslau Siuchyk, a secretary of BPF, convicted of participation in the trade union meeting on November 5, were released. Their friends met them with a wind orchestra.**

(to be continued on p.6)

ARREST ON THE EVE OF THE CELEBRATION

In Minsk on the eve of the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights they continue to arrest the participants of the action of the 6 December, dedicated to this event.

On December 9, unknown people in civil clothes arrested and beat Stanislau Karashchanka, a minor. It occurred shortly after the meeting staged by the Free Trade Union on Masherau Avenue. At the meeting Stanislau Karashchanka was together with Vadzim Kanapatsky (an observer of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96») who was released a week before. He had been sentenced to 15 days in administrative detention.

- When we were marching near the House of Sportsmen, - Stanislau Karashchanka says, - I felt somebody's pat on my shoulder. I thought that it was my friend's joke but suddenly I heard: «Stop! Criminal Investigation Department» When I turned I saw a man without uniform. I broke loose from his grip, but another man in civil clothes seized me. They dragged me to the car. There was a crowd of people. They were demanding to let me go. Somebody shouted: «They beat our fellows! Do not allow them to seize him!» At that time some militia men came up to the crowd. The men in civil clothes threw me on the ground and holding by the collar, started to strangle. Then they dragged me to the wall of the building of Sportsmen. There one of them said: «Why are you showing off? Get into the car otherwise you will have problems!» After that another man in civil hit me. In the car they were beating me on the back all the way.

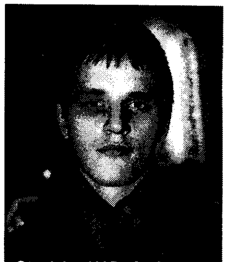
Stanislau Karashchanka was taken to Central Police Department of Internal Affairs be a grey «Lada» car. Hardly had I got out of it in front of the building they gave me one more «farewell» blow. In the Department of Internal Affairs militia men started to make a report.

Who is that guy and why the militia men treat him so brutally?

Stanislau Karashchanka is 16 years and a half. He is learning to be a metal worker at the Centre of Professional education of Partyzansky District. Apart from that he is a member of Malady Front – deputy chairman of Partyzansky branch of this organisation.

By the way they asked his name for the first time only in the Police Department of Internal Affairs. It proves that the people in civil worked with «the photos», taken at the meeting on December 6 and that is why they did not need names. In the Central Police Department of Internal Affairs they explained what he was charged with. He was guilty of holding a microphone for Yury Khagyka while he was talking and is also accused of shouting: «Long live Belarus». In the department he was shown dim photos, taken on December 6 be special forces at the meeting.

- In the room, where they were making a report – Stanislau Karashchanka continues, - a man entered and said that I am a minor and it is prohibited to beat me. I was told that I would be fined for participation in the meeting, then they phoned home to ask my mother to come and to take me. My mother answered that she could not come because she was with a little child at home. The militia men hesitated whether to let me go alone or not.


Stanislau KARASHCHANKA

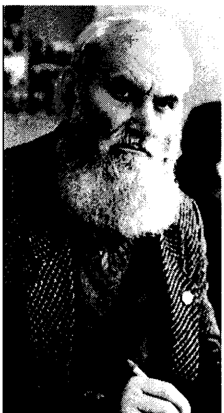
On the evening of December 6 Stanislau Karashchanka was examined by a surgeon and a nervopathologist at Minsk hospital № 5. He was diagnosed: injuries of soft tissues on the head.

Stanislau Karashchanka appealed to the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96», he plans to make a complaint to the prosecutor's office for non-competent acts of law enforcement agencies. Stanislau Karashchanka wants to launch an official investigation, concerning the fact of his abuse by the unknown people in civil and would like to know who they were.

Mikola KACHAN

GUILTY BUT INNOCENT

The Belarusan authorities have not changed their attitude towards the personality of Valery Shchukin, the deputy of the Supreme Soviet. But this time they express it in a different way. Recently during the meetings of opposition the Minsk police called the participants through megaphone and Mr. Shchukin in particular to break up. On December 6, the Human Rights Meeting staged by BPF on Kastrychnitskaya square had hardly begun when Valery Shchukin as well as four other participants were given an official subpoena. Under this subpoena the next day on December 7 together with Yury Khadyka, Ales Bialatsky and Mikola Statkevitch Shchukin was expected to come to the Central Department of Internal Affairs to make a report. Moreover they were to see A. Barysionak, the judge of the central department. But on that day Valery Shchukin failed to see A. Barysionak. Two hours before the time appointed by the militiamen from the Central Department of Internal Affairs, in the neighbouring district, Partyzansky, there began


Valery SHCHUKIN

another trial on those people. It was the last trial conducted by Judge M. Trubnikau on the participants of the Trade Union March on November 5.

The deputy had not been pleaded guilty. He said that on November 5 after the meeting permitted by the authorities he was walking from the Tractor Plant to the editorial office of the «Narodnaya Volya», which is in Engels Street, near the building of the presidential administration. Valery Shchukin's way coincided with the way of those people who were carrying a petition to the President and his officials. Shchukin was holding in his hands the flag of the Free Trade Union, which he had taken from Maria Alieva, the chairman of the FTU, because he would not have allowed a woman to carry such a long flag.

The witnesses, the militiamen, confirmed that deputy Shchukin was at the head of the column of marchers and was shouting the slogans. But the chief inspector of Partyzansky Department of Internal Affairs, Alyaksei Mazrakou defined Valery Shchukin's guilt in the following way: «He has not stopped the march in spite of the fact that the militia had asked him to do it, because he is respected by people and they could have obeyed.» As to Shchukin he has made two petitions. First of all he said that not a single legislation makes provisions for people's amenability for participation in the actions that are not permitted by the authorities – it concerns only their organisers. Secondly, on November 5 there was not a single document, which could prohibit the movement along Kazlova Street, Daugabrotskaya Street and on Skaryna Avenue. There was only the advice of the City Executive Committee to go to the nearest park. Valery Shchukin's case ended in a scandal. After the verdict being brought – 15 days in administrative detention – Valery Alyakseevitch said:» I am a regular officer and officers do not go to a guardhouse under convoy. Tell me, when I have to be in prison and I will come.» In response to it judge Trubnikau called for a militia detail and the journalists witnessed the fact when the militiamen were dragging the deputy outside and threw him into the car.

Valery Shchukin will be released two days before the Catholic Christmas. The authorities have enough time to charge him with the participation and making a speech on December 6. We would like to remind that the previous New Year Valery Alyakseevitch celebrated behind bars. The authorities may present the oppositioner with the same New Year gift.

Tatyana ZHDANOVITCH

Victar Ivashkevich

«Next Year We Are not Going to Go to Meetings...»

The end of the XX-th century resembles its beginning – today workers have to go to the streets to stand for their rights as well. And more and more often we hear that the Free Trade Union of Belarus (FTU) is at the head of the workers' actions. Belarusan enterprises authorities fear the FTU influence. The state authorities are annoyed by the ac ive disagreement of the Free Trade Union with the social-economic policy carried out in Belarus. Today I talk with Victar IVASHKEVICN, a member of the FTU Board, the Chief Editor of the FTU Bulletin «Rabochy» («Worker»).

- Mister Victar, when and why did Free Trade Unions appear?

- Just, it is worth mentioning workers' movement and trade unions. Official trade unions in Belarus have always been «a school of communism» and from those communist times have remained, in fact changeless, even in its members. Now there exist Trade Unions Federation (TUF) headed by Mr. Gancharyk, who was a leader of the Trade Unions under communists. A group of democratically oriented leaders singled out of the official Trade Unions under the influence of different democratic processes: Mr. Buhvostau, the head of the agricultural machinery construction branch, Mr. Fiedynich – the head of the radio-electronic industry branch. They perform in the Unions the roles of so-called Gorbachev – they try to carry out reforms, breaking nothing, not going beyond the old structure, they produce an illusion as if not everything were lost and there were something to struggle for. And there are the free trade unions of Belarus, that comprise the Independent Trade Union, which exists on the basis of Saligorsk miners' Trade Union, the Free Trade Union (FTU), the Trade Union of Metal Workers (Tractor Building Plant, Minsk Automobile Plant, Engine's Plant), the Democratic Transport-workers Trade Union, the Free Trade Union of Teachers «Pryzvanie» (vocation). They are all united into the Free Trade Unions Congress.

Free Trade Unions made their appearance at the times of struggling with the authorities. They were set up from strikes' committees found during the strike of April, 1991. Free trade unions were founded at the beginning of 1992, and their main difference from the official trade unions is that here no friendship between employers and employees is welcomed.

The heads of primary trade unions organisations on the plants are not appointed, but elected. It is formally, but actually they are appointed by the directors, thus they are more dependent on them then on their trade unions supervisors. They as a rule carry out a role of some kind of personnel managers.

- Perhaps this dependence had its effect on the cancellation of the action appointed on December 2?

- Right, that is the main reason for that. Official unions, eventually, had the intention to lead the people out against Lukashenka.



Victar IVASHKEVICN

But after his meeting with directors and the threats to take to prison or at least to fire them, the directorate called its trade unions leaders and suggested: «We should cancel it, otherwise we will be taken to prison». And the leaders of trade unions organisations on the plants said to Buhvostau that they could not go, though people were ready.

That is what concerns the situation with the official trade unions. Free trade unions supported the action, which should have taken place on December 2. They were not the declarants of the action and that is why when official unions refused it, free trade unions did not have legal authority to carry out the action.

- And what happened on November 5?

- As for the 5 of November supporting the official trade unions' application to conduct an action of protest we handed in our own application.

When the official trade unions renounced free trade unions held the action independently. At the meeting the resolution was accepted where it was declared that if in a month the authorities do not start a dialogue on TV with us we will call people to strike. The main claims of workers – minimum wages not less than 100$, to give it the status of first and foremost payment, free access to radio and TV – were passed over the President's administration.

- How was it done?

- At the meeting it was decided to carry the accepted resolution to the presidential residence. Thus «an unauthorised procession» took place. For the organisation of that procession I was handed a subpoena to the Partyzanski Court. The sitting on the case had been put off 3 times and took place only on November 8. Judge M.Trubnikau made a decision – 54 mln roubles fine. I consider this resolution not fair and I have lodged appeal against this resolution to the City Court.

In accordance with the resolution of the meeting, held on November 5 in a number of Belarusan towns strikes were being prepared for November 8 and 9, but under pressure of authorities, KGB, visitors from «the president's vertical line», they were held only in Grodna, Magilev and a small meeting in Minsk. Plants representatives mentioned they were preparing strikes but did not carry them out. It can be said that the free trade unions declaration to hold impeding strikes failed. We failed to carry that out except for the strike on «Selmash» in Brest.

- What are the plans of the Free Trade Union?

- We can say that the Free trade Union acted not cautiously (accurately) and wrongly, but they were the only ones to act and they are going to act further. Now we intend to reach an agreement upon the plan for the next year, to be more precise – half a year. Our claim remain the same and we will think about how to come up to the general strike more quickly and technically efficient. We thought it would start more now but one call in the newspaper «Rabochy» is not enough to raise people. That is why our task is to work out a plan and our actions to obtain at last the fulfilment of the declared claims. Next year we won't go to meetings: we should prepare strikes and «rail-way actions». We expect the workers' activity pike in spring or in the end of winter. The matter is that the slump in the economy in any case will lead to the outburst, when at the beginning of the year a dollar will cost 500 thousand roubles and the wages actually will fall down to 10-20 $. The tension grows and it will force its way. The Free Trade Union task is to get ready for this outburst of workers' discontent and if it takes place to give it organised forms. Free trade unions are necessary – they are like an immediate respond corpse. When there is a strike taking place somewhere, we must get information on it quickly and send extra newspapers, materials, lawyers, economist there to help formulate the claims, to create the primary trade unions structures this outburst to have its continuation. Our job is direct this inevitable outburst against those who are really responsible using all the reasonable possibilities.

The newspaper «Rabochy» can be very useful here. It may be not liked by everyone, but people are attracted to it by the TV programme and they buy it. My wife, for instance, asked me yesterday: «Victar, where is the paper? I want to know what is on TV». And it is the same in 80000 families.

The fact that today «Rabochy» has 85 thousand copies and the total number of the Free Independent Unions is only about 20 thousand, shows that today this newspaper is a phenomenon more than the Free Trade Union because, as the leader of international proletariat said – «A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and orator, but also a collective organiser».

Interviewed by
Tatsyana LINNIK

It is quite a long way to the bus stop, but Mr. Kukabaka happened to have left his coat, scarf, gloves and even his warm pullover at home. He makes unhurried but confident steps on the frozen, covered with snow ground in his sandals. Having listening to my monologue about the temperature something about 40 degree below zero and the necessity to take care of the health, Mr. Mikhas answers with a smile and goes further. There is no a shadow of surprise on the faces of passers – by probably his neighbours. As if it is very natural to go almost barefoot on the snow.

- It is not like it used to be – explains Mikhail Ignatavich to me.

He says it with a slight shade of dissatisfaction either with himself or inexorable time: he is 62 on December 4. – It is not already like it used to be. Usually in the prisoner camp I took walks barefoot up to November 12. Today it is only November 7 – Mr. Kukabaka shrugs his shoulders.

I remember him like this – a man who fearlessly challenges severe winter...

called a schizophrenic. The Court admitted that «Kukabaka M.I. presents particular danger for the society». He was 33, the age of Jesus Christ, one would say today.

- Mr. Mikhas, how did you begin your way to dissidency?

- It was a way of an ordinary worker. I was not cherished with peculiar information in any way. I had the same newspapers, magazines, journals, literature as anybody else. I never was abroad and never acquainted myself with forbidden literature. I did not have a radio to listen to the foreign radio. I was not really much interested. My dissidency grew up out of my experience, my observations. It was quite a long way: from the complete belief to the complete denial. I was a rather curious person, liked to discuss, I doubted everything. Maybe all that had its effect.

For example, I read a newspaper article where it is said that there are some thousands bars and restaurants in New-York. I got interested. Our propaganda called New-York the city of contrasts – the city of millionaires and poverty. I take a reference book: there are about 13-14 mln people in New-York. And one bar or restaurant is for about 300 people. Bur there surely are different cafes, fast-foods, bistros, etc. I lived in Gur'ev at that time, it was a regional centre in Kazakhstan. I count all the «eating places» in the town, look up the popu-lation in a reference book. And the result – an «eating place» fore more that 4 thousand people. Such a great difference with New-York. And immediately – questions.

There have been a lot of such events. At this stage it follows dialectics: quantity of these facts turned into quality. When there are a lot of facts and you can not find any explanation – it means

The Last Soviet Dissident

or a Belarusan Man Who Has Become «a Present to New-York»

It was not the last time Mikhail Ignatavich Kukabaka did it. Severe frosts of Soviet times and all the winds of the epoch could not make this man give up, hide, fall silent and retract his believes and principles.

The war took his parents and his childhood away from him; «peaceful soviet times» took his youth. Many times he happened to find himself far from his Motherland. Today Mikhas Kukabaka is the most famous Belarusan dissident.

My friends from Ukraine once said to me that they almost did not know cases of resistance to the Bolshevik's regime in Belarus after the World War II, with the only one exception of Mr. Kukabaka.

With that we started our talk in Mr. Kukabaka's flat in Moscow.

- What do you think, why do we know so little about the political opposition in Belarus?

- The main reason for that is, of course, the fact that Soviet authorities always tried to keep silent about any case of political opposition. And they admitted it only if such facts reached the West and got publicity there. «There are some renegades», - admitted they and made everything possible to compromise such people. From this point of view I was lucky if the words are right to express it. I managed to break the wall of isolation.

The First Case

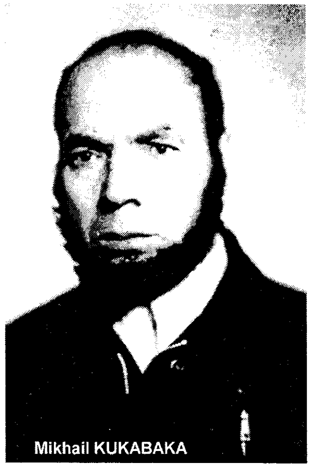
- I am a Belarusan. I was born in Babruisk and spent my childhood there. Then I graduated from the technical school and was sent to Siberia to building-sites of so-called communism. The next – army. Again, I served far from Belarus – at Lake Baikal, in the Far East. After the army Mikhas Kukabaka worked on the plant in Kiev. Soon he had to move Vladimir region in Russia and after some time the following document appeared. I deliberately quote it in the original language. Russian (note – the article is translated from Belarusan) firstly, to preserve the style and spelling and secondary, because of the non-translatable play-of-words – extraordinary soviet slang of red tape, and the court.

In the «definition» of the Criminal cases of the Regional Court of Vladimir region on the «case №2-3c» from November 4, 1970 it is stated: «Kukabaka M.I. in 1967-1970 let out slanderous statement discrediting the existing political system among surround him people.

In the autumn of 1967 on the plant in presence of Vasiliev, Stanislavski (7 names all in all) and other workers Kukabaka slandered the Soviet reality, Soviet state's policy, declaring that democratic rights existed only in the capitalistic countries. In November, 1969 in the presence of (5 people mentioned) at a shop №8 of the Radio Plant and other workers Kukabaka cast aspersions on the socialist democracy, praising the so-called bourgeois freedom of speech and press. In December, 1969 on the territory of Moscow Kremlin in presence of tourists Kukabaka slandered soviet reality and soviet political system. On the New Year's Eve at the party in a women's hostel in presence of Romanenkova, Mozhinskaya, Baranova, Fedoseeva and Chursanova Kukabaka extolled life abroad and slandered the position of the working class in the USSR. In February, 1970 during a cleaning up of the territory he commented on the slogan «To live and work like Lenin» in a hostile way.

During the detainment and search of Kukabaka letters to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Montegue A., an English journalist (the letter concerned his article about a traitor Kuznetsov) and other notes, containing calumny on the Soviet Union and its political system, were confiscated.

According to the resolution of the court Mikhas Kukabaka was «released from criminal responsibility» and was sent to «a mental hospital of a special kind» for compulsory treatment. He was



Mikhail KUKABAKA

somebody tells lies. As Zaratustra says, there is such a succession: a good thought – a good word – a good deed... So Mr. Mikhal moved to deeds. He started to speak against voluntary unpaid work on Saturdays and Sundays, against the actions to support the struggling Vietnam, or something else. Then there was Czechoslovakia. M.Kukabaka as well as many others was called to military registration and enlistment office in order to be sent to suppress «Prague Spring». But he said: «If you send me, I will have to turn my rifle on the Soviets, - I will fight for the Czechs. All this resulted in the first attempt of the authorities to send him to a mental hospital. But something prevented them from it. In 1969 «Komsomolskaya Pravda» printed the material by an English communist writer Aivaar Mantegue. Mr. Michas remembers a very mean letter against the Russians writer Nikolai Kuznetsov, who emigrated to Great Britain. Being very impressed Kukabaka wrote his answer to this letter: dear Mister, you do not live in this country and can not make conclusions about our life, especially in such a rude manner... By the way, he was writing articles during Prague events, he even attempted to give them in Czech press through the General Consulate of Czechoslovakia. Mr. Mikhas still does not know if he succeeded. But «the authorities» got interest in him after seeing those letters. They started to call him for so-called preventive talks in KGB, in the Kiev City Communist Committee, they threatened him. Kukabaka had to leave Kiev for town of Alexandrov near Vladimir. As it is seen from the above-mentioned court report, in this very town he was arrested for the first time. Almost 6 years passed and it had been sufficient to associate the name of Mikhas Kukabaka in the democratic countries with a symbol of spiritual resistance to the social regime and he had been released under the pressure of international community.

A Meeting with Motherland

- After my first conviction I came back to Belarus. It was in 1976. At first I tried to settle in Russia, but I failed. At that time in the Soviet Union they adopted a law providing privileges to former orphans, whose parents perished during the war. At that time I lived in a boarding school in Babruisk. I came up to an official – it seems to me he was the secretary of the City Committee. «First of all you have to prove that you were a resident of a children's home». What have I to prove? In Minsk street, the children's home №3, it can be easily checked. «Secondly, you have to show the card which says that your parents perished during the war». Where can I find it? I found myself in the children's house when a little child, I was an orphan. Finally, it is not so hard to inquire the required papers.

That conversation with official did not turn out particularly favourable. He said that any Soviet person is entitled to have living accommodation, it is provided in the humane Soviet Constitution – it means you have a right to build it, to buy it, to queue for it... There were no privileges for Kukabaka and people like him in the newly-written Constitution.

Soon after that, Mikhas Kukabaka was sentenced to another imprisonment term. Before that, in 1977, they tried to send him to «the special hospital» in order to attach him to the Soviet constitution. But that time he did not have to stay there for long. But a year later he had a finger in the more serious and longer case... «So, I have not settled down in Belarus», - Mr. Mikhas sums up his talk.

He was sentenced again in accordance with Article 186 of the Soviet Criminal Code – «for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda». Formally, it meant 3 years in camps. A prisoner had to spend those 3 years under an extreme pressure, aimed at his «repentance». The power thought that Kukabaka should give up his previous political views in public and therefore they planned to invite correspondents from the paper «Sovietskaya Byelorussia». They did their best to portray the approaching radiant future: he admits his faults, he is released with a clear conscience and all his life is changing at once for better. He had to spend the last three days in the camp but on that day near the camp a special car appeared. Kukabaka was brought to prison where they brought an action against him. Later he was once more sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment – for «not being on the way of improvement».

Later on the story had repeated. But that time he was sent to prison a week before the release and charged with Article 67 of the criminal Code of the USSR (the same anti-Soviet agitation, but more dangerous – «aimed at injuring the regime»). I wonder how it is possible to injure it being in prison. It was Kukabaka's fourth conviction. And the third one running not a single day at liberty.

- Those who are charged with Article 67 are kept in special camps: in Mardovia, Perm region ... All the time they promised that they would never release me. They started to release when «Perestroyka» commenced, when Gorbachev came to power. In 1987 Gorbachev issued a decree on amnesty...

Nevertheless, Mikhas Kukabaka had not been released yet. KGB would released only on condition that a prisoner wrote to the prosecutor's office an application that he would n ever involve in «anti-state propaganda».

- I have written 3 or 4 applications. But I have promised nothing. I simply claimed that I had never been involved in criminal activities, I just had my own points of view and was strongly against any violation of human rights. I kept on doing my time.

In 1988 Mikhas Kukabaka was the last Soviet nonconformist. A clear nonconformist – a part of political prisoners was charged with, for a example, spying but not with «agitation». In December, 1988 the leader of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev planned to visit New-York. It was a very important visit. The famous issue of the New York Times with a headline «Mikhail Gorbachev's present for New York» was timed to coincide with that visit. The article said the Mikhas Kukabaka, the last Soviet nonconformist was released specially before the UN session with a participation of the Soviet leader. All in all he had spent 10 years running in prison. Nowadays Mikhas celebrates his birthday together with the day of release.

Life as it is ...

In the room and in the kitchen on the ceiling there are little symbols of the Motherland. Two white-red-white flags. One of them is «historical».

In 1991 after the notorious events in Vilna, the Soviet empire was celebrating the day of the Soviet Army. On February 23, there was a festive meeting on Manezhnaya Square in Moscow, Yazov and Kruchkov, KGB and the Ministry of Defence leaders made speeches. Together with young pacifists-anarchists Mr. Kukabaka came to the square to express his protest. Their slogan was: «To defend our Motherland from the Ministry of Defence». Mr. Mikhas was holding in his hands a slogan and national flags of Lithuania and Belarus. The furious crowd of Yazov and Kruchkov's supporters had torn everything to piece excepting for the Belarusan flag. The demonstrators-democrats were beaten. The picture on which somebody is hitting Mr. Kukabaka, later appeared in press titled: «Birth pangs of pluralism».

- Why did not you stay in Belarus after its liberation?

- It is not because I did not want to. I visited it ... The authorities met me rather coldly. I visited Mogilev and supported by the local deputies of the Belarusan Popular Front had a meeting with the mayor of Mogilev – a Mr. Gabrusev. I told him that I had been in prison, was rehabilitated, Belarusan, I spent my childhood there. Is it possible to get a room, a size of a prison cell at least, maybe in a communal flat? I do not want to be dependent on the plant's authorities. I lived in the hostel, belonging to the plant. In case I change a job, I will be expelled from it. The mayor said: «There are millions of people like you». We did not understand each other, I went to Moscow and settled down there.

The man, who has spent all his life in public institutions, who is associated with anti-Bolshevik movement has not found a place in his own country... Even at the beginning of 90s. He has not managed to start a family in his youth like people of the same age, he has no grandchildren. Mikhas Kukabaka collaborates with the Helsinki Association and simply wants to help people. All the hardships he has overcome, have not made him cruel.

- I simple live, work, make money for living and do nothing special. – he says. – Perhaps it is because I have no special skills, I am not ambitious. Sometimes it is difficult to publish my own articles. There are a lot of pulp-writers nowadays, and moreover, my radical views on many questions...

- What about human rights activities?

- I do not like the word a «defender» of human rights. It is used so often nowadays. One day it may be worn out. A man should simply live and have dignity. As Emanuel Kant said: «Have courage to make use of your own mind». The best human rights activity – is to be oneself, to be example for others to follow.

Tatsyana SNITKA

EVENTS, FACTS, COMMENTS

(continued from p. 1)

On December 2, near a police office, in Akrestsin Street police officers arrested Uladzimir Sapagou, a press photographer and a member of Belarusan Association of Journalists (BAJ), U.Sapagou had planned to take some pictures of U.Kanapatsky and V.Siuchyk, who were supposed to be released on that day. The police officers explained that somebody had stolen a film-camera and it was necessary to check Y. Sapagou's equipment. Paying no attention to Sapagou's explanations, who had a camera, but not a film-camera the police officers had brought him to a police station of Maskousky district by a service car. But they let him go without making a report.

On December 3, Yaugen Murashka, chairman of the Gomel branch of the Belarusan Helsinki Committee was sentenced to 10 days in administrative detention for showing up on the central city market on November 7 with a placard saying «Government is a Criminal who Violates the Rights of its Citizens!» He attempted to sell it. But Murashka was charged with organising a picket without permission.

Early in the morning on December 5 unknown patriots decorated the town of Slutsk with white-red-white flags. National flags with black ribbons appeared on roofs of the prosecutor's office, on the building of the public court and on the city executive committee. They reminded the citizens of the town of the Slutsk armed anti-Bolshevik rising in November-December of 1920.

On December 4, the Minsk City Executive Committee decided to ban organising any meetings, mass marches, rallies, demonstrations and pickets on Kastrychnitskaya Square in Minsk (located in front of the presidential residence). Nowadays in order to hold any mass event on this square you need a permission of the Cabinet of Ministers or the Minsk City Executive Committee.

On December 6, on Kastrychnitskaya Square in Minsk there was a meeting on the occasion of the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The deputy chairman of the Belarusan Popular Front Yury Khadyka and the chairman of Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» Ales Bialatsky were the declarants of this action. The action took place in spite of the City Executive Committee's obstacles and those made by police officers. That is more, on the square the organisers of the action were given subpoenas to the Central police station.



Shortly after the action the police started mass detention. The cars of outside observance besieged the headquarters of the Belarusan Popular Front, the people who were leaving it, were seized by people in civil clothes and put into cars. The head of public reception of the «Viasna-96» Liubou Luniova and a journalist Genadz Barbarych went to Central police station in Minsk to get know the total number of the detained, but they were driven out with using a physical force.

The detained spent a night in the police station: A minor Fiodar Zhyvaleusky and Uladzimir Kanapliou were released on the same day.

On December 7, in Minsk people detained on the rally on the occasion of the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stood trials. They examined 15 administrative lawsuits. Judge Anatol Barysionak brought the following verdicts:

1. *Ales Bialatsky,* chairman of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96», declarant of the action – 10 days in administrative detention.
2. *Yury Khadyka*, deputy chairman of BNF, declarant of the action – 10 days in administrative detention.
3. *Syargey Shynkevich* – a 7 mln roubles fine
4. *Aleg Shagulin* – 3 days in administrative detention.
5. *Vyachaslau Biryla* – a 7 mln roubles fine.
6. *Mikhail Novik* – a warning
7. *Ludmila Graznova* – parliamentarian of the 13 Supreme Soviet – a warning.
8. *Yadzviga Labkovich* – a warning.
9. *Leanarda Mukhina,* a teacher of junior school, an observer of Viasna-96 – spent a night in the police station, at a trial was warned.
10. *Viktar Rabushka* – 3 days in administrative detention.
11. *Eduard Boki* – a warning.
12. *Mikalai Karalionak* – a warning.
13. *Uladzimir Kishkurna* – 3 days in administrative detention.
14. *Ales Stanisheusky* – a 7 mln roubles fine
15. *Mikola Statkevich* – chairman of the Belarusan Social Democratic party «Narodnaya Gramada» – 3 days in administrative detention

On December 7, in Partyzansky court in Minsk Valery Shchukin was on trial for participation in the Trade Union action on December 5. Judge Mikalai Trubnikau sentenced him to 15 days of administrative detention.

On December 7, in the town of Gantsavichi, Brest region, Mikola Zan'ka was walking along the towns' streets with a placard: the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under a severe supervision by the militia officers.

On December 8, in Minsk Pavel Sharamet, ORT correspondent, got an international Press Freedom Award granted by an executive director of the Journalist Defence Committee Ann Cooper.

On December 8, in Minsk on Yakub Kolas Square there was a meeting against the deteriorating living standard of workers. There was a quotation from one of the Lukashenka's speeches: «If the eyes of workers are sparkling when they well paid!» Shortly after the meeting was over Lyavon Sadousky was seized by the people in civil clothes on a tram stop. In the car L.Sadousky heard them talking to each other: «We are working in accordance with photo №3». The photo, taken on December 6 on Kastrychnitskaya Square, is meant. L.Sadousky spent a night in a police station in Akrestsin Street. On December, 9 there was a trial, Sadousky was warned. The men in civil clothes, who are detained him, were present at it as witnesses.

On December 8, at a police station in Akrestsin Street they refused to take an English textbook and to give it to Ales Bialatsky, chairman of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96», sentenced to 10 days in administrative detention for organising a meeting, dedicated to the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Under the instruction it's prohibited to pass books to people who are kept in administrative detention. The sausage, fat, fruit and goods of personal hygiene brought for 7 prisoners were taken by the authorities without any protest. Apart from that the prisoners got fresh newspapers, after a careful censorship (they allow to pass only those paper, which can be bought in news-stands). At first all the 7 prisoners, were kept in one cell. Later on Valery Shchukin, who is famous for his articles, describing the conditions in which the prisoners in Akrestsin Street are kept, was transferred to a single cell.

On December 9, the Belarusan Popular Front staged a demonstration against Belarusan-Russian integration on Yakub Kolas Square in Minsk. The demonstrators were holding placards saying: «The Closer the Alliance with Russia, the More Beggars in Belarus!»

On December 9, about

200 people took part in a meeting staged by the Free Trade Union (FTU) near the Palace of Sports on Masherau Avenue in Minsk. They protested against social and economic policy, conducted by the Government. Besides they demanded a rise in minimum wages.

On December 9, after the meeting staged by the Free Trade Union (FTU) on Masherau Avenue people in civil clothes detained Stanislau Karashchanka, a minor (16,5 years old), a student of the Professional Centre of Partyzansky District. He is learning to be a metal worker. While detaining he was badly beaten by the people in civil clothes who hadn't even shown their identifications. In the central police department they have made a report. On the evening December 96 S.Karashchanka went to hospital №5. He was examined by a surgeon and a nervopathologist. He was diagnosed: soft tissues injuries in head.

On December 9, Kirausky district court decided to postpone its sitting concerned with the case of the ex-chairman of the collective farm «Rassvet» Vasil Staravoitau as there was deterioration in his health – acute condition of bronchitis. This is for the first time when the authorities admitted his health to be bad. The temperature in the cell where he is kept is low enough. Besides, there is no medical cell, no medical equipment there. Meanwhile V.Staravoitau's health continues to get worse.

On December 10, the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» staged a demonstration near the Central Department Store (TsUM) in Minsk on the occasion of the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On December 10, the Belarusan Helsinki Committee staged a picket on the occasion of the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On December 10, the Belarusan social-democratic youth from the organisation «Maladaya Gramada» stage a picket on the occasion of the 50 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the park at the corner of the Niamiga and Garadsky Val Streets.

Information Department of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96»

INTERNATIONAL AMNESTY

Thousands of people are kept in prison only because of the fact they do not support the policy run by the government of their country. Vast majority of people are in prison according to the verdicts brought by the courts which are submitted to the authorities. Many prisoners haven't even been charged with. Capital punishment and tortures are widely spread. Men and women disappear after being taken into custody. Children and teenagers follow the way of adults. Others are doomed to be killed by secret governmental departments. Such wrong-doings take place in hundreds of countries and surely provoke a certain response of the world community. The human rights protection is a responsibility and a duty of every person, and any activity connected with it shouldn't have any obstacles neither in the country, nor abroad. This is the basic principle of the International Amnesty.

The International Amnesty is an independent international organisation, which promotes human rights.

In 1961 an English lawyer, Mr. Peter Benanson wrote an article in a newspaper, in which he appealed to start peaceful activities to release the prisoners of conscience. In the course of the following year more than one thousand of people from different countries offered their practical assistance. What started as a sole attempt later turned into universal movement. The International Amnesty neither support, nor resist any political regime or system in this or that country. It neither shares, nor questions prisoners' views, whose it is intended to protect. The organisation preoccupies with human rights only, which are violated in cases, irrespective of ideology of the governments or the victim's convictions.

The major aims of the International Amnesty are:

- to release all the prisoners of conscience;
- to provide political prisoners with just and quick trials;
- to abolish capital punishment, tortures and cruelty to prisoners;
- to prevent executions and «disappearances» without -trials.

The International Amnesty is strongly against taking hostages, tortures, murders of prisoners, against other severe murders. The International Amnesty holds the view that the governments should hear responsibility for all these matters.

In case of urgent measures to save lives of people throughout the world there appear a number of people of good will.

Thousands of letters, faxes, telexes and telegrams are sent to the government which violates human rights. They demand to cease political pursuit, to release illegally and groundlessly seized people, to follow the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Nowadays the International Amnesty had its branches in 40 counties, besides there are many local organisations.

To ensure sincerity and immunity the members of the International Amnesty don't study the cases of violation of human rights in their own countries. But at the same time they may, under the provisions, take part in organising seminars, conferences and other activities aimed at human rights education. To make the Union stronger, the members of the International Amnesty from all over the world are preoccupied with these activities.

Nowadays in Belarus, in Minsk in particular, there is an initiative group aimed at opening the International Amnesty department. It is composed of young and initiative people, who are planning to cease to be beginners and join other famous human rights organisations by the middle of the next year. The initiative group is headed by Uladz Labkovich. It consists of students, workers, journalists and lawyers.

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ANNIVERSARY BEHIND BARS

(continued from p. 1)

They managed to stop a wave of protest by extraordinary efforts and threats. But the economic situation in the country continues to get worse. On the eve of the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights there were articles in press, quoting that more than 90 per sent of population lives below the poverty line, the average wages in the country is 24 dollars (at the same time the minimum one is 1.5 dollars), the average pension is 14 dollars... Moreover, at most of enterprises, especially financed from the budget. in the collective farms the wages hasn't been paid for some months, the prices for daily products have raised extremely. It's ridiculous to speak about human rights prosperity when people are starving, when the most trite things, such as struggle for existence, come first.

Andrey NALIVA

A Trip behind Bars

By Andrey Melnikau

6 o'clock in the morning. It is time to get up. We put down «helicopter». They serve breakfast: porridge (I am not able to say which one) and tea in aluminium cups, wound round with threads and without handles. They give three or four «oars» (spoons) for all present. We take turns to eat.

At 8.30 – a ring for morning check-up. A new shift: a chief with officers on duty go round all the «houses» (prison cells). During the call-over everyone has to call his name, article he was accused of and his or her status (under investigation, under trial, convicted), the term of imprisonment. It is easy to spot an intelligent he is convicted in accor-dance with Article 188: offering resis-tance to an official. Later on he says: «We are all political, to say nothing about me, the cops don't like such people as I am».

After the check-up me together with my cell-sharers are directing to medical examination. They escort us through an obscure corridor into a neighbouring yard. We have our breasts X-rayed, blood tests. It is far from being pleasant. That is more the syringe can be used several times. The prisoners negatively respond to this test: a doctor hides one-time syringes, as to the common syringes, he doesn't sterilise them, the needles are blunt, he can not find a vein. To make it shorter, a sadist.

Then we go to have our photos taken: full face and half-faced. Now one more obligatory procedure: «a piano» – to fingerprint with the help of a computer: for «Interpol». In case of any further detentions it would be easy to identify me.

On that day we had one more pleasure: we went to a bath-house together, all in all 8 people. We take off our clothes, immediately took it to the «frying-room». While we are washing, the clothes is under thermal treatment. We are given 20 minutes to wash. It seems that they don not hurry us up, precisely 20 minutes.

In the «house» they don not leave us in place. One by one we are called out to a «god-father». A well-bread second lieutenant interrogates why you are put in prison. I don not deny that I have crossed Lithuanian border but I add that I was walking on the places where the Belarusans have lived from ancient times, on the road from Vilna to Polatsk, which is 700 years old... I tell about the conference in Gdansk, organised by the Belarusans, about the «Bard's autumn» in Belsk-Podlyassky (Poland), about the congress of young Belarusans from the whole world, I speak about my old and ill mother, a little son who are in my care, and I can not help them being in prison. I say that they haven not taken it into consideration when bringing a verdict. That is why I have to go on a hunger-strike to obtain more decent conditions.

My confession was logical but at the same time very naive. Every prisoner has ill relatives or little children. But never in history it was sufficient to change the punishment. We are not in the West.

As the intelligent said, «the god-father» does his best to dissuade me from a hunger-strike. He cites the same arguments as the prisoner did. His final words are: «You will sap your health».

I ask the «god-father» for some pieces of papers to write a petition to change the punishment in the court of Lenin District in Grodna, where there is a prison. I write it in Belarusan. When I read it out in the cell my neighbours highly evaluate it, saying that the style is nice and the arguments are well-grounded. In general, the prisoners highly evaluate the skills of writing.

It is midday. Dinner time. A pea soup – very thin, but there are some peas in it. «Oars and plates» are the same as they were in the morning. Me and one more fellow are lucky enough to have a portion of bread and fat with onion after dinner: we had an early sleep yesterday and did not have supper like the others. «My colleague» eats it very quickly, as for me I take time and enjoy reading a newspaper and eating. I used to do it when I was free. All of a sudden I notice an unkind tension in the eyes of a «sotchyk». Some minutes pass and he can not bear it and asks me when I will finish eating it because he wants to go toilet before going to «houses». By the way, it is one of the most important moments of life in prison: it is impossible to eat and to go to toilet or toilet air out simultaneously. It is one of the most crucial laws. In extreme cases you have to ask for permission. In certain communities it is considered to be a great «kasyak» (wrong-doing) to go to toilet while someone is having dinner, but generally speaking much depends on the people who surround you. It is easy to commit it among «the youngsters». They live on the concepts developed in colonies for minor delinquents where they struggle not for life but for self-realisation. That is why there is much senseless and irrational in it. «The youngsters» avoid red colour (pedestrian colour), whichever things they are cabbage (food for goats), sausages (because it has a form of a man's organ), fat, things which are dropped (apart from shoes, all the rest is considered to be «contacted»), soap.

Adult authority may ignore «youngsters» odd things. The elder stronger may initiate eating sausages or putting on read shirts. Later on the others may join him. But the initiative of the weak in such cases may be dangerous. But, oddly enough, a hard school of youngsters' concepts can not protect them from other «laws» in adult zones.

(to be continued)



*(Continuation.
Beginning in №№ 15-22)*

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